

# Rita Kazhdan

Rita Kazhdan

St Petersburg

Russia

Interviewer: Anna Nerush

Date of interview: December 2001

Rita Abramovna is a well-wishing, enchanting, very frank and surprisingly cheerful woman. Being womanly by nature, Rita carefully looks after herself, dresses in a modest, but modern and tasteful way. She is a leader in her family, a caring mum and granny. She was happy when she was able to give presents to her daughter's family when she received compensation for being in the ghetto during the Holocaust. Rita leads an active public life. She is a frequent visitor at Hesed and uses every chance to communicate with her friends and new acquaintances.



[Family background](#)

[Growing up](#)

[During the Great Patriotic War](#)

[After the War](#)

[Glossary](#)

## Family background

I am Rita Abramovna Kazhdan. My maiden name is Fridman. I want to tell you a little about the family, in which I grew up, and of those relatives I remember and who are no longer alive.

My maternal grandpa's name was Grigory Vselubsky, or, in Yiddish, Gershen. I don't know, when he was born. I suppose that it was in Minsk [Belarus]. I certainly don't remember grandpa Grigory, as he had died before my birth in the 1920s on some Minsk street of cardiac rupture, or as they used to say at the time - of 'angina pectoris'. Stories and recollections of relatives - that's all I know of him. He owned a plant that produced aerated water and a few shops in Minsk. He was, if we shall speak in present-day language, a big businessman. Grandfather Grigory was a well-known and esteemed person in the city. He, a Jew, was even invited to the government's balls with his beautiful daughter Rozalia, my mum. As they put it, she would be the decoration of these balls. Grandfather Grigory had the financial means to give all his children an education. But none of them, except my mum, wanted to study. All of them longed for work and trade.

My maternal granny was Elena Vselubskaya. I don't know her maiden name. Unfortunately, I am also in the dark about the place and date of her birth. I remember her. She died in Minsk in 1931, when I was quite a small girl, about two years old. I remember that after grandpa's death she lived with us and she was ailing all the time.

In the family of Elena and Grigory Vselubsky there were four children: Berta, Rozalia, Fanya and Yakov. The eldest was Berta who emigrated to America with her daughter Rut in 1914. Fanya lived in Minsk. She was a housewife and had three children. Her husband Mayer worked at a printing house and was considered a guru in his business. At the very beginning of the war Fanya and her family perished in the Minsk ghetto. Yakov continued to do grandpa's business, but not in Minsk but in Mohilev; by this time he didn't own the plant. He worked at the state plant producing aerated water.

My paternal granny was Sarra Fridman. I didn't really know her as I was too small when she died in 1933. They lived in Leningrad and we in Minsk. According to the stories she was a kind, affectionate woman devoted to her husband and children. She skillfully ran the house, cooked well. As my parents told me she cooked for the most part traditional Jewish dishes. Granny never punished her children or grandchildren.

When we visited Leningrad with my father on his business trips, I met my paternal grandpa Semyon - or as we called him Shimon - Fridman and I remember him very well. I recall us arriving in the morning, because the train from Minsk used to arrive in Leningrad in the morning, and I remember him praying. He was always sitting with his face turned to the East, wearing his tallit. I don't know exactly the names for all these gadgets, which one could put on his head and hands - bricks, as I called them - and he prayed. [Editor's note: The interviewee is referring to the tefillin.] There was one more detail: grandpa prayed for a long time, not noticing anyone, and stayed in the corner, but he allowed us to look at him. At that time I sometimes messed about, but all this seemed very interesting to me. Grandpa didn't teach me to pray at that time, I was quite small. Nobody approached him until he stopped praying. The only person acquainted with all the traditions was his younger son Grigory, who lived with grandpa and granny.

Grandfather Shimon was the owner of a dye-house in Minsk before the Revolution of 1917 [1](#). He often traveled on business to Poland and Germany. The family was considered to be one of the most well-to-do families in the city. All grandpa's property was nationalized after the Revolution of 1917, and he escaped with a part of the family to Petrograd. Grandpa died in 1936, when he was, in my opinion, 75-76 years old.

Grandpa Fridman's family lived in Petrograd in a big communal apartment [2](#). In the spacious hall, if one can say so, or anteroom, there was a huge chest which belonged to my grandpa; at that time forged chests were in fashion. What was inside it, I don't know. I also recall how he washed potatoes, as he was keen on hot jacket potatoes with butter. And we liked them, too. I also recall a big room of approximately 35 square meters, partitioned off, in which uncle Grigory later lived with his family. The walls were covered with wallpaper, and beautiful photo-portraits of grandpa and grandma were hanging on them. Then the youngest daughter Fanya Fridman, my father's sister, took the portraits to Moscow. Aunt Fanya, father's sister, died in 1986, she was 83. After her death her children threw these photo-portraits in the garbage can, though they knew beyond doubt that their ancestors were on them. These grandchildren do not need even those relatives who are alive. Now they live in America, but they have not sent us any letters, or any news. Especially my cousin Lara, she was a very selfish woman and remained such. She is 9 months older than me - she doesn't need anybody or anything.

Grandpa Shimon and granny Sarra Fridman had six children: the girls were Sonya (she was the oldest), Tsilya and Fanya and the boys Veniamin, Abram and Grisha. Abram was my father. Grisha and Abram were born one after the other with a year's difference between them. All of them were very decent people, very honest. Only one of them was a university graduate - the oldest Veniamin, because before the Revolution he had left for Kiev and graduated from the Academy of Commercial (at that time it was the same as a university). Uncle Grisha was a builder. He had completed courses for draftsmen and foremen (already in the Soviet period) and worked in the building industry. The women, for the most part, were housewives.

My father, Abram Semyonovich Fridman, was born in 1896 in Minsk into the rich family of his father, the manufacturer and dye-house owner. I don't know if father had even studied anywhere, but he worked as an engineer and director of studios at the State Film Company of Belarus. He was a kind, fascinating person, a man of fashion; the center of all social gatherings in our house. When all grandpa Fridman's property was nationalized and he escaped from Minsk to Petrograd with a part of the family, my father remained in Minsk. He got married to mum in 1918. The wedding was in Petrograd. Both families were present at the wedding.

My mother Rozalia Fridman [nee Vselubskaya] was born in Minsk in 1898. Her childhood and young years were spent in luxury and insouciance. Her family was a very well-to-do family. Before the Revolution she finished a Russian secondary school. One can say that my grandparents were rich, because secondary education was rather expensive. When my mum got married, they had no children for 10 years and she was engaged in self-education. Mum knew English, French, German, Yiddish, Hebrew, and Polish. For example, when she studied English, for some period she spent all her time with an English governess who walked with her even to the lavatory's door. They used only English both in writing and talking. When she began to study German, she had already had some basic knowledge of it, because Belarus was occupied by Germans in 1914-1917, during World War I, plus she had a private tutor. With the French language it was the same story. There was a hired teacher because they could afford having one.

My parents loved each other very much, and the fact that they had no children for a long time didn't affect their relationship. They were very progressive people. Mother was always in the first ranks. At that time such organizations as GTO [Ready for Work and Defense], PVHO [Anti-Air-Raid Chemical Defense], Osoaviachim [Society of Assistance to Aviation and Chemical Defense] were fashionable. She participated in all these arrangements, right up to flying in an airplane - she took an airplane when there were excursions over the city. She, as a progressive woman, was always rewarded with first prizes.

## Growing up

I was born in 1929. My brother Georgy Fridman was born in 1932. We grew up in Minsk. Minsk was a semi-provincial, semi-European city, because Belarus was within the Jewish Pale of Settlement [3](#) up to 1917 when Jews were not permitted to live where they liked. So there were a lot of Jews in Minsk. For example, according to my recollections and people's stories, before the war the total population of Minsk was 250,000, out of which 80,000-100,000 Jews were confined to the Minsk ghetto - in spite of the fact that some Jews were able to leave the city before the war.

We lived in a good two-room deluxe flat, which was bought for my parents by grandpa Grigory Vselubsky after their marriage. The flat was heated with firewood. After the reduction of living

space per person by the Soviet authorities, before my birth, a Latvian lady was accommodated in my parents' flat. She was a government official and was given one of our rooms. Before this reform, our flat was considered a luxury one because everyone around lived in communal apartments. We had a dining room of 30 square meters and our bedroom was 18 square meters plus a small corridor and a kitchen. We had meals only in the dining room.

Amongst the furniture we had a walnut couch - a small sofa made of walnut padded with green velvet. We had a dark oak sideboard with nice wood engraving, and on it there was a pink tea set, a 'Kuznetzovsky'. [Kuznetzov was a famous pre-revolutionary owner of porcelain works.] It was of magnificent beauty, a superfine one.

I remember going to a private kindergarten, where there was the so-called frebelichka, that is, a governess, who went for a walk with us, played various games in German. Her name was Margarita Robertovna. We spent a lot of time doing needlework. I was taught to embroider and to knit by the housemaid. I embroidered excellently, knitted excellently, and I can still do all these things now. I was dressed very well, in a modern, beautiful fashion.

I was the pet of the family. Granny Sarra always wore decorations, rings and earrings. I played with the jewelry. Whenever grandfather went abroad on business, he always brought something for my mum. She was a very attractive young woman (of course, before I was born). Grandfather brought all sorts of trinkets for her. And I was keen on her trappings. I was simply keen on them. She had a sack made of the black playing glass beads, and there was a yellow rose or lily on it, or something of this kind, made of beads. And the sack was half-full of that jewelry. Daddy saved them, but when we found ourselves in the ghetto, mum left all these things in the housemaid's charge. We didn't see them again.

Father treated us children dearly and lavishly. He saved my dowry, which they began to collect straight after my birth. There were two blankets: the first one I used to cover myself with. The second was a rose-colored, silk quilt, and with it came a full set of 6 quilt slips; moreover, everything was decorated with French lace.

Mum's elder sister Berta emigrated to America in 1914. And we received books from there for some time, I don't know exactly for how long. I just remember these books in English - very beautiful books with pretty pictures. I liked these books very much.

Up to the mid-1930s, mum didn't work. She was a woman of the high life. In 1936, when I began to go to school, and my brother Grigory grew up a bit, mum became proficient in accountancy and went to work in the State Railway Administration. Though we were well-to-do people, it was impossible not to work in those years, as it was condemned by the public morality.

Mum never cooked common dishes - soups and so on - but she knew how to bake in a very delicious way. In the kitchen there was a Russian stove [4](#), and on holidays she baked very tasty, fancy cakes with the housemaid.

In those years there were special shops in the USSR, the so-called Torgsin stores [5](#). And there, in Minsk - I recall it as if it happened yesterday - there was a huge shop on Lenin Street, where everything was sold for special bonds or currency. One could obtain these bonds in exchange for gold or silver, mostly silver. We had a lot of silver things in our family. Maybe father's salary was

insufficient because, you see, mum didn't work, and the best goods were sold in Torgsin stores. So mum made use of our valuables exchanging expensive stuff - spoons, silver forks, heavy silver things - for currency from time to time. This way she was able to buy everything we needed. We were well-provided for, we lived comfortably. Mum didn't wear the jewelry she had, because it was considered indulgent. One should go through all of it and see it with one's own eyes, because however hard I'm trying to explain this to you, if you hadn't experienced all that, your idea of that period will certainly be incomplete.

Unfortunately we didn't observe Rosh Hashanah or Sabbath. People used to gather at our home on Saturday or Friday, it was a 'visiting day', one might say. The parents had polite conversations. Mother always played the piano very well, sang well; so we always had good company. There was never any vodka on the table, only at the New Year Party. We just had tea parties. Tea, cakes. I don't remember going to the synagogue. Only after the war did I learn where it was situated. By the way, the Germans didn't blow it up but our people pulled it down. It was intact after the war. I saw it. Well, then they modernized Minsk architecture, and they thought the synagogue spoilt the city's outward appearance. Now there is another building in its place.

Before the war nearly every summer we rented a summer cottage in the village, where our housemaid came from, and my parents let out a room for actors from Moscow and Leningrad on tour in Minsk. Many of them became friends of the family, for example, the famous hypnotist, a Polish Jew, Wolfgang Messing, the famous Jewish poet Moisey Teiv, and some Germans as well, who got married in Minsk. For instance, father had a close friend named Rudolf, who had retained his German citizenship and was not shot like other people of German origin during the Stalinist repression [the so-called Great Terror] [6](#), but was given the option of leaving Russia within twenty-four hours. And shortly after they left, father was summoned to the GPU [7](#), because they had been great friends with Rudolf. Everybody was suspected of espionage. But that was only one reason. The other was that they were looking for gold in our house.

I have terrible recollections. Daddy was repeatedly taken to the GPU. Once he was under arrest for six months, around 1936-1937. Mum once interrupted my summer vacation and took me to the city. She took me with her, as if we were shopping, to the center of the city along a street where the prison was situated, as I learnt later. Mum said: 'Stand still here and look that way.' I was uncertain about why. And then, when they let daddy out, I found out that mum had taken me with her so that he could look at me from his cell. After this, they rather often conducted a search in our flat. It happened mainly in the summer when we were in the country. They were not interested in mum's jewelry, because they were looking for money and gold coins. We certainly had them, but safely hidden.

### **During the Great Patriotic War**

On 22nd June 1941 the Great Patriotic War [8](#) broke out. My parents were working on the 22nd, when the war was announced. It was a Sunday. Everybody was shocked and panic-stricken, but no one believed it was true. On 24th June they [the Germans] began bombing Minsk from early morning. My parents didn't believe that they were bombing Minsk. They decided it was an alarm practice. My parents left for work. I remained at home with the housemaid. At 12 o'clock mother came running from work. When the massive bombardment of Minsk city was launched we went downstairs with the housemaid and my brother into the air-raid shelter. Air supply ceased, and in



order not to suffocate we went out into the street and saw these bombs falling on the city with a terrible shriek.

By the evening, strings of people with small perambulators and babies, goods and chattels were walking along the Mogilevskoye highway - the way to Moscow to the East. Daddy was at work, and wasn't back yet and mum couldn't go anywhere without him. By 10 o'clock in the evening Minsk was completely bombed-out. Houses were on fire, I begged mum to leave. I was very afraid. We took some cereals, some bread with us, and walked to the village, in which our housemaid's relatives lived. And mum left a note for daddy about where we had gone.

By that time our house didn't exist anymore; everything was burned. We got settled in the yard of our acquaintances. On 28th June the Germans marched through the city without a single shot. After some time, Mayer, the husband of mum's sister, who worked at the printing house on a rotary stencil duplicator was forced by the Germans to print leaflets: 'Beat the kikes! Save Russia!'.

On 25th July we were herded into a ghetto. They sealed the territory off with wire. There we settled together with the family of mum's friend. Father got fixed up as an electrician in the printing house where Mayer worked and maintained the family. At that time we had nothing - everything burned with the house. According to the order of the authorities we had to hand in the list of all lodgers of our house. My father, a very respectable person, was elected a house senior man, and he was to carry our lodger's lists to the Judenrat [9](#). It was 31st August 1941. Suddenly Gestapo men appeared in helmets, with chains on their chests, with number plates, with sub-machine-guns. They cordoned the district off and began to search everybody, including our house lodgers. This is what a raid is: the Germans cordon some district off and start to catch people. The Gestapo did this, but with the assistance of our policemen. My father wasn't back by the evening. It turned out that when he was going to take the documents to the Judenrat mum asked him to drop in on her sister Fanya, who lived in the next street. But there was also a raid there. Everybody was captured. Only a four-year boy, my cousin Boris, whom they kicked under the bed, was left. Thus he survived, but later perished all the same.

We didn't see father again. The three of us remained with my mother. After the massacre our street became a Russian district and we were resettled in Stolpetsy Lane. Mum went to work at the Judenrat as an accountant. The authorities ordered the handing over of all furs, fur collars, fur coats - everything expensive that people had - to the storehouse in the Judenrat so that the Germans could choose everything they needed for their army, for their wives and for themselves. In brief, we suffered from deprivation and hunger. We had nothing to barter with. It was a very hard time. Once a week mother got a loaf of bread and that was all we had. But we lived somehow because mother was with us.

To find out about father's fate Mum had hidden her laty [number identification plates of Jews in ghettos] and went to see Rudolf's friend, also a German, who, after having married a local girl, had been living in Minsk since before the war. This friend found out what happened to my father and informed mum that they were all caught during the August raid. They were urged along the street, forced to raise hands and sing songs. They were herded into the prison where dad had already served a term earlier, and there they were shot.

On 2nd March 1942 another pogrom took place. The massacre lasted for three or four days, I don't remember now. We were hiding in a room separated from the next room with literally a plywood

wall. Each word in the next room was audible. In the room that was fifteen meters big we herded together 12 to 15 of us plus a nursling and a woman ill with cancer. When the massacre was over, we were found in this room. But, luckily, the mobile gas chambers and the policemen who guarded Jews were already gone, so we were simply kicked out.

Abram Aronovich Levin, the husband of mum's friend - a wonderful man, very decent, in advanced years - was a pharmacist. We moved to his place. In this drugstore there was a so-called malina, a place where one could hide from the fascists. Abram Aronovich himself stayed in the drugstore as the manager, and we edged ourselves into the pharmaceutical cupboard in the next room, where drugs and measuring glasses were kept, through the lower shelf, which could be pulled out; then Levin put the shelf back. This is how we concealed ourselves.

Mother got into the habit of smoking. 15 to 20 people were hiding in the room. We were told the massacre was over and it was possible to come out, but Abram Aronovich nevertheless made sure that we didn't leave. But mum came out and Abram's wife asked her to go home and pick up certain things. As mum was a working person, she had special documents with her. Everybody knew the Germans were catching (and shooting) only unemployed people. We never saw mum again. Then we were informed that she had been taken away with other Jews, and there was a baby in her arms. Mum had a perfect command of German, but apparently there were not only Germans but policemen as well - the traitors, who served for the Germans - so she didn't manage to leave the column. So my brother and I were left without any means of subsistence.

I was like a skeleton covered with skin. But I always had a ruddy and round face. So they didn't pay special attention to me. That's why I could walk away from the crowd that convoyed to work and beg in the streets and in the Russian district. And from time to time I succeeded in taking something into the ghetto for my brother. Once as I was walking out of the ghetto, I came across my classmate who helped get me fixed up in the plant where one could do hard unskilled work. 75 Russian Jews were working at the plant. They were roofers, cleaners, carpenters, and laundrymen. Before the war it had been the machine-tool plant named after Voroshylov [10](#), and during the occupation German tanks were repaired here. I was a pin-up, very beautiful girl, especially as I did not have a pronounced Jewish appearance, with long light brown braids; by and large, they accepted me for employment. I got a ladle of soup every day. It was nearly a liter, with rotten meat, and a small slice of bread. I ate some of it and the rest I carried to the ghetto for my brother. Around the time that mum died typhus raged throughout the ghetto. Georgy fell sick. But our savior Abram Aronovich procured Sulfidine for a lot of money. This at least saved the child.

Nearly all the people in the ghetto were annihilated. One of those Germans working at the plant, Willy Shott, spoke excellent Russian. It turned out that until 1928 he lived in Moscow with his family. His father had been shot and his mother and children had been expelled to Germany. Naturally, he hated Russians. I remember him saying: 'If Stalin and Hitler would be hung with one rope, it would be good for everybody'. Once I brought myself to ask him to take care of my brother Georgy as well. Shott took him as a courier to the Daimler-Benz firm. Soon I was transferred to it, too. One of the army prisoners working there made a false bottom in my pot, in which I piled up cartridges stolen from an ammunition dump. I passed them on to a guy named Yuzik. I knew he was in connection with the Suvorovsky partisan group, and he promised to take my brother and me out into the forest. In the summer of 1943 Yuzik vanished. I felt very sorry for him, and with his disappearance my hopes collapsed, too.

Then we began to prepare strenuously to become partisans. My brother went to make a reconnaissance. Having accomplished a dangerous 18-km march from the city to the East, he came to the village where we had rented a summer cottage before the war. The locals confirmed that the partisans were in the vicinity, but every night the Germans came to the village and conducted a search of each house, each corner of the cellars and lofts. My brother came back with no result. But such obstacles only intensified our desire to join the partisans.

Once, having covered over 30 km, we met partisans from the Semyonovsky regiment. But they were on their way to a military mission and weren't able to take us with them. They explained which village we had to go to, which hut to enter and where we should wait for their return. They kept their word: on the way back they took us along to the partisan district. Thus, we found ourselves in the Zorinskiy partisan group, as we got to know later, in the 106th regiment. They constructed shelters from fir boughs, gave us boots and two sheepskin coats. In the winter we moved to the central camp. We dug up potatoes, our principal food, in the burnt villages. Our regiment fought the last battle with the Germans in June 1944, when the Soviet army liberated Belarus. The Germans fell back. So for us the war was over on exactly this day. In our regiment we each were issued a certificate, straight on the cart, stating that from 12th September 1943 until 6th June 1944 we were in the 106th partisan regiment.

Before her death mum and I had been in a bath-house. As we were walking along the road, she said to me: 'Well, if I should die tomorrow, at least I will have washed myself today. Remember the address in Moscow just in case'. It was like a kind of foreboding for her. Mum died. And when our partisan group joined units of the Red Army, I wrote a letter-triangle to Moscow to inform our relatives that we were alive but without parents. [During the war one could send a letter from the front only in the form of an envelope-triangle, easy for the censors to open.] It caused a real shock in Moscow.

The house in Minsk, in which our family had lived before the war, had burned down. For days on end my brother and I strolled about the ruined city. Fortunately, my uncle Leonid Rubo, the husband of dad's sister Fanya, arrived from Moscow within a week. He was deputy people's commissar [deputy minister] of the electrical industry of the USSR and was able to fly to Minsk to get us. He took us with him to Moscow. And we flew in a warplane. In Moscow we began a difficult, but normal life.

We went to school in Moscow as if for the first time. I always remember Moscow teachers thankfully - those half-starved, threadbare ones, who had neither textbooks nor writing materials for us. They were devoted to us with all their hearts. Thanks to these teachers I understood all the richness of the Russian language, and still recollect this when I hear my granddaughter talking to her coevals in an incomprehensible Russian slang.

As there was a system of ration cards for foodstuffs in 1944 and 1945, my brother and I couldn't stay in the same family because it was very difficult for the family to keep two orphaned children. My aunt Fanya had two kids of her own: Lara, who was nine months older than me, and Georgy, born in 1936. Then my brother Georgy I and joined the family. Uncle Leonid was the only person in the family who worked. How could he keep such a horde? The ration cards were given according to the registered number of people in the family only. So, according to the registration there were two grown-ups and two children in the family, and the ration cards were only for them. But they had to



feed us, another two mouths, too, although they didn't have ration cards for us. To get the cards they would have had to register us in Moscow, and for that they would have had to adopt us. It was too complicated, so they brought us up and shared food with us. They decided to dispatch me to Leningrad in agreement with dad's sister Tsilya, and Georgy remained in Moscow.

## After the War

By March 1945, I had already moved to Leningrad and went to school. My aunt persuaded the school to accept me into seventh grade, as I was grown-up enough. Having lived for many years in a Belarus environment, I made an incredible number of mistakes in Russian at first. But after a month of study I wrote quite correctly. I was on friendly terms with everybody in the school. I didn't experience any anti-Semitism. All children had gone through the blockade. I liked sketching and chemistry very much. I didn't get on very well. I tried, but it was very hard for me. Because, in spite of the fact that I had been an excellent pupil before the war, I had forgotten everything under the terrible war conditions. There were neither newspapers nor books.

I completed school more or less well. Then I entered the Food Industry Technical School. It was the only place where they accepted my documents. I don't know why I applied to this place. Firstly, there wasn't a person to ask for advice. In 1946 there weren't so many educational institutions. They hadn't been reorganized yet. Secondly, the technical school was situated in a beautiful place on Palace Square. I studied for three years and after one of the incidents at practical work I decided such a study was not for me. We did practical work at the distillery. Our task was to determine the type and the age, and other characteristics of wines by smell and by taste. But the wines were very delicious. The women who worked there, always carried a noggin and herring or vobla [salted stockfish] in their pockets. For the most part, they drank spirits. But we drank wine as it was our duty. And drank as much as we liked - we were young. And at the distillery, there was the following order: if you managed to walk out through the checkpoint on your own feet, then OK, good luck, go home. But if you fell down at the checkpoint, well, then they left you to spend the night at the factory. Once we were all drunk but managed to leave on foot. Three of us - all girls - went home together. In the morning, I woke up on a chest and said to myself: 'This isn't for me!' And shortly after, I left work and found another job.

I was to get a job at the Vavilov State Optical Research Institute, as I knew that a relative of my friend Papshtein worked there. He was a candidate of science and needed a laboratory assistant. We arranged that I should go to see him, and he arranged it with the chief of the laboratory, as it was a secret laboratory. But when it came to the personnel department, I wasn't hired and they said that there were no vacancies. An official of the regional committee was courting me. I told him what happened, and he rang the secretary of the party organization of the Vavilov Institute straight away. A day later when I arrived, I was accepted as a laboratory assistant.

I lived with aunt Tsilya. She was working as a simple manicurist and shared her income with me. Once in the summer my acquaintance Frida, who was already married, invited me to visit her at the summer cottage in Pargolovo. Her baby, husband and mother were there. I was playing with her son on the beach, when her husband's friend arrived. They were close friends. It was love at first sight on his part. I was attracted to the fact that he was from a good family, and he had a separate flat. And love came to me some time later, and we have been together for 48 years. We got married in the summer of 1953.

As for all Soviet people, 5th March 1953, the day of Stalin's death, has remained in my memory. At that time I was studying at a dress-making course. Suddenly they declared Stalin's death. I heard exclamations from everywhere 'Oh! Ah!' and I calmly said: 'Well, thank God!' in some mechanical way. I remember one more incident from this year. I was at my friends' place, at the house of an elderly architect Galkevich. I was on friendly terms with his wife Lyuda. She sewed for me. During a conversation I said of Stalin: 'It serves him right!' Something of that kind. Alexey, Lyuda's brother was there when I said this. As Lyuda told me later, he said: 'I shall imprison her for such words!' And then Galkevich, a Russian, reacted very sharply: 'If you dare do so, if a single hair falls from her head because of you, you will never set foot in my house, even though you are my wife's brother!'

My husband, Edgard Grigorievich Kazhdan, was born in Leningrad in 1926. He graduated from the Institute of Motion Picture Engineers there and after that worked at the Institute of Cinematographic Equipment. He's now retired. We buried my husband's father in 1957, and his mother, in 1988.

In 1958 I gave birth to our daughter Julia. After her birth I didn't work for four and a half years but devoted myself to raising our child. Then I tried to find a job near my home. Across our street there was a secret institute, and I was told that one of its laboratories needed employees. But when I went there, I heard the cliché: 'There are no vacancies', though I knew there were. I went to work as a passport officer at the Soviet Star industrial complex. And then, having become proficient in the profession of accountancy, I worked at the Trudprom industrial complex up to 1981. Now I am a pensioner.

I regret very much that I left the Optical Research Institute. I had a lot of friends there, both Russians and Jews. There was a wonderful atmosphere of communication. I was always the center of attention, though all my colleagues were much older than me and were engaged in research work.

My daughter lives in Leningrad. She graduated from the Institute of Motion Picture Engineers. Her daughter Olya is a student of the Agricultural University in St Petersburg.

## Glossary

### **1 Russian Revolution of 1917**

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during WWI, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

### **2 Communal apartment**

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns shared apartments continued to exist

for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of shared apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

### **3 Jewish Pale of Settlement**

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population (apart from certain privileged families) was only allowed to live in these areas.

### **4 Russian stove**

Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in winter time.

### **5 Torgsin stores**

Special retail stores, which were established in larger Russian cities in the 1920s with the purpose of selling goods to foreigners. Torgsins sold commodities that were in short supply for hard currency or exchanged them for gold and jewelry, accepting old coins as well. The real aim of this economic experiment that lasted for two years was to swindle out all gold and valuables from the population for the industrial development of the country.

### **6 Great Terror (1934-1938)**

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

### **7 GPU**

State Political Department, the state security agency of the USSR, that is, its punitive body.

### **8 Great Patriotic War**

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and

threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

## **9 Judenrat**

Jewish councils appointed by German occupying authorities to carry out Nazi orders in the Jewish communities of occupied Europe. After the establishment of the ghettos they were responsible for everything that happened within them. They controlled all institutions operating in the ghettos, the police, the employment agency, food supplies, housing, health, social work, education, religion, etc. Germans also made them responsible for selecting people for the work camps, and, in the end, choosing those to be sent to camps that were in reality death camps. It is hard to judge their actions due to the abnormal circumstances. Some believe they betrayed Jews by obeying orders, and others think they were trying to gain time and save as many people as possible.

## **10 Voroshylov, Kliment Yefremovich (1881-1969)**

Soviet military leader and public official. He was an active revolutionary before the Revolution of 1917 and an outstanding Red Army commander in the Russian Civil War. As commissar for military and naval affairs, later defense, Voroshilov helped reorganize the Red Army. He was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party from 1926 and a member of the Supreme Soviet from 1937. He was dropped from the Central Committee in 1961 but reelected to it in 1966.